

Sister M. LaVern Olberding
1944 – 2026

Sister LaVern Olberding, 81, passed away on January 11, 2026, at The Alverno in Clinton, Iowa. A funeral Mass will be celebrated at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 17, at The Canticle, 841 13th Ave N in Clinton, with Rev. James Vrba presiding. A livestream link is available at <https://clintonfranciscans.com/news--events/in-memory>. Visitation will be at The Canticle from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Friday, January 16, with a rosary at 3:45 p.m. and wake service at 6:00 p.m. Burial will be in St. Irenaeus Calvary Cemetery. Pape Funeral Home is assisting.

Sharon Rose was born on January 15, 1944, in Fort Dodge, IA, the eldest child of Vernice and Margaret (Lynch) Olberding. She was baptized on January 30, 1944, at Sacred Heart Church in Pocahontas, IA. She had four sisters, Rita, Joan, Verna, and Mary Anne, and two brothers, Ronald and Merlin.

She attended St. Columbkille School in Varina, IA, for both elementary and high school, graduating in 1961. She entered the Sisters of St. Francis at Mount St. Clare Convent in Clinton on September 8, 1961. She received the name Sister Mary LaVern at her reception on June 13, 1962. She pronounced first vows on August 12, 1964, and made her final vows on August 12, 1967. Among her novitiate classmates were Sisters Mary Jane Hopkins, Carmel Jacobs, and Barbara Rosener.

Sister LaVern earned an A.A. from Mount St. Clare College, Clinton; a B.A. in chemistry from Marycrest College, Davenport, IA; and an M.R.E. in religious education from Seattle University, Seattle, WA.

She taught science, math, and religion courses at schools in Clinton and Danbury, IA; Lexington, NE; El Cajon, CA; and Maysville, KY. She was the Director of Religious Education at parishes in El Cajon and Manteca, CA. Sister LaVern served as a campus minister at the University of Louisville, Louisville, KY. Later, she served as a pastoral minister at a parish in Louisville and as the pastoral care coordinator for Dismas Charities in Louisville, where she worked with felons at numerous halfway houses. She returned to Clinton and served as a campus minister at Mount St. Clare College/The Franciscan University.

In 2004, she moved to the San Diego, CA, area where she continued to promote active nonviolence and peacemaking while working as an Operations Coordinator for Atwood and Thompson, Inc., in Spring Valley, and as a catechesis coordinator for a parish in El Cajon.

In 2012, Sister LaVern co-founded the Franciscan Peace Connection in La Mesa, CA, and ministered as its director until its closure and her retirement in 2024. This outreach ministry offered opportunities for workshops, study groups, and trainings in promotion of active nonviolence and life skills to a variety of people and groups.

She was the Clinton Franciscans' recipient of the Franciscan Federation's Peacemaker Award in 2018. During her time in California, she served on the board of directors for the Peace Resource Center of San Diego, acting as vice president and president.

She moved to The Alverno in Clinton on September 16, 2025, and remained there until her death on January 11, 2026.

Sister LaVern was affectionately known as the "Fun Nun." Her laughter and smile always brightened the room. She extended her kindness and compassion to everyone, especially those living on the margins. She left a lasting impact on all the lives she touched, and she remained in contact with many of the individuals that she ministered to or with.

Sister LaVern is survived by her sisters, Joan Godbersen, Verna Halligan, and Mary Anne "Annie" Hawthorne; brothers, Ronald (Carol) and Merlin (Robin); several nieces and nephews; great-nieces and great-nephews; and the Sisters of St. Francis with whom she shared life for 64 years.

She was preceded in death by her parents and sister, Rita Olberding.